

2014 PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION REPORT

The San Luis Obispo County Park Commission would like to sincerely thank the Board of Supervisors and Dan Buckshi, County Administrative Officer, for creating the long-awaited independent Parks Department. We applaud your visionary decision to move forward with implementing the Department that will provide direct input to your Board and the Administrative office on park issues, and better represent the public's interest. It will improve accountability and service, streamline decision-making for a more cost-effective use of resources and clearly define Park and Recreation's costs within one department. Coupled with an innovative new Director, we are very excited about the potential for the program.

As your Board knows, national statistics show parks, open space, and recreation programs are vital to our health. Besides the obvious place to play, parks reduce crime and lower costs for law enforcement and incarceration, increase work productivity, attract tourist dollars, and are the vital component in livable communities.

The Commission believes that our county and cities need to develop a long-term strategy for a strong park system for the benefit of people of all ages. This is important to San Luis Obispo County residents. The 2007 Citizen Survey stated, "the highest rated characteristics of San Luis Obispo County were air quality, appearance, and recreational opportunities."

County Goals and Parks and Recreation

The County's community wide goals are to provide:

1. A safe community
2. A healthy community
3. A livable community
4. A prosperous community
5. A well-governed community

Unlike any other single department within County government, we believe a strong Parks and Recreation program will help achieve all of these goals when a strong leadership commitment is developed for both resources and strategic partnerships.

1. A Safe Community: Well-maintained parks, strong recreation programs, and well-placed facilities will assist in keeping youth busy and help reduce crime in the county.
2. A Healthy Community: Parks and Recreation directly contributes to the health of County residents with facilities, places and programs that provide physical activity, connections with nature, community interaction and fun! Finding and creating more resources and making a strong philosophical commitment toward prevention will create a healthier population that will be more economically productive and produce greater rewards for all of society.
3. A Livable Community: Livability is largely affected by conditions in the public realm, places where people naturally interact with each other and their community, like parks. They provide vibrant public spaces for mix uses, conservation of landscapes and protection of natural, cultural and historic resources.

4. A Prosperous Community: A county that delivers accessible and safe trails, unique open space, and attractive park opportunities close to where people live and work has a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining visitors, businesses and employees.

5. A Well-Governed Community: Government could see parks as “discretionary” and “superfluous” — as only a place for Johnny and Suzie to play on the swing sets. Or, we can see parks and recreation supporting the physical and mental health of our citizens, promoting the economic stability to our county, reducing juvenile crime, increasing workplace productivity, providing activities for young and old alike and helping the environment.

2014 Park and Recreation Commission Priorities, Accomplishments and Recommendations:

Beyond the establishment of an independent department and the recruiting of a highly energized and visionary leader to make Parks all they can be. Please see attached Project Accomplishments List. The Commission has the following priorities, notes 2014 accomplishments and lists related Commission recommendations:

1. Complete a Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment.

Since the acceptance of the Parks and Recreation Element in 2006, the Commission has recommended the completion of a Countywide Needs Assessment many times. This critical roadmap for decision-makers will establish priorities, needs and wants from the input of all county regions and all user groups. Your Board supported the PRC priorities in 2010 with approval of a special project including funding of \$30,000 to help start the Needs Assessment.

Accomplishments:

Staff has been unable to locate additional funding to move this project forward. No additional actions have been taken, but the critical need remains.

Currently, Staff is maintaining a list of priority projects based on the PRE and utilizing the PRE to prioritize new projects. A number of local groups have conducted formal and informal needs assessments in their own communities. This information will be added to the prioritization process; however, this does not replace a comprehensive, strategic, statistically accurate countywide-based Needs Assessment that will guide good decision-making in the future.

2014 Commission Recommendation:

When funds or partnerships become available, the commission believes it is very important to implement a comprehensive Needs Assessment for the County. The questions the Needs Assessment should ask and answer include:

- Assess current San Luis Obispo County park, recreation, and open space services (in terms of the facilities and programs provided within the County as well as the quality of existing facilities and programs). This would include determining the level of service and/or acres currently provided per 1,000 residents for existing lands, facilities, and programs;
- Research key areas, each to be prioritized separately, the:
 - 1) Need for additional parkland (neighborhood, community, and regional),
 - 2) Need for additional recreation (outside of parks and natural areas),
 - 3) Need for additional natural areas,
 - 4) Need for additional recreation programs; and
 - 5) Existing and anticipated future maintenance priorities.

- Compare San Luis Obispo County trends against industry trends and standards;
- Determine the communities in the greatest need for additional parks, recreation programs and/or natural areas;
- Work with stakeholder's (the public, relevant agencies, Parks and Recreation staff, the Parks and Recreation Commission, and the Board of Supervisors); and,
- Recommend specific method(s) of financing high priority park, natural area, recreation projects, and facility maintenance (both in terms of initial purchase/set-up and long-term maintenance).

2. Complete existing projects.

Projects in progress include:

Bob Jones Pathway and Octagon Barn Trailhead projects;
 Cayucos Pier repairs;
 Morro Bay Golf Course irrigation line replacement;
 Santa Margarita Lake Boat-In camp facilities;
 Morro Bay to Cayucos connector;
 Cayucos 1st Street Accessway;
 San Miguel Park expansion;
 Nipomo Community Park improvements;
 Templeton to Atascadero Connector Trail;
 Avila to Harford Pier trail;
 Santa Margarita to Garden Farms multi-use trail;
 Jack Ready Park Development;
 Biddle Park Playground replacement;
 Dana Adobe Interpretive Center improvements;
 Norma Rose Park;
 San Luis Obispo Botanical Garden hardscape improvements;
 Nipomo Community Park Playground replacement
 Rios Caledonia building renovation

Accomplishments:

Please see attached Project Accomplishments List.

2014 Commission Recommendation: A concerted effort must be made to complete existing projects, especially those that have already been funded.

3. Complete the remaining Outstanding Trail Offers.

Accomplishments:

Staff has made great strides in completing the review and acceptance of the Outstanding Trail Offers. Currently, approximately thirty easements are ready for acceptance. However, these segments are each for individual parcels and will not result in a complete section of trail that could be opened to the public. Therefore, as these easements are accepted they will be placed into inventory for a future date when additional segments may be secured to provide a complete trail.

2014 Commission Recommendation:

The Commission recommends the remaining OTO's be completed. Staff should start the process of reviewing the mapped easements with the TAC (Trails Advisory Committee) to identify a plan to complete the priority segments. A good trails network responds to and distributes demand by providing safe ways for people to get to recreation features. The non-profit organization, SLOPOST, has offered to donate some funding toward this goal.

4. Maintain General Fund support.**Accomplishments:**

Your Board approved operating budget for FY 2014-15 did not require any reductions to General Fund support. The Commission sincerely appreciates the Board of Supervisors support for parks and understands that many other services and programs received reduced General Fund for the same period. The Board's support for County Parks and recreation has enabled staffing and services to remain consistent, and more to be accomplished for the benefit of the public we serve. Though the operating budget is not optimal, funding has been maintained to provide safe and usable parks and recreation areas.

In addition, at the close of FY 2011-12, the Board approved an additional \$600,000 for Park Projects Reserves. In FY 2011-12 a portion of these funds was allocated to high priority projects (Cayucos Pier, Rios Caledonia, ADA lifts for County Pools and Bob Jones Pathway). In FY 2013-14 the remaining \$287,000 along with additional Reserves was allocated to the Cayucos Pier Restoration project.

2014 Commission Recommendation:

The Commission requests that the Board continue to support no reductions in the General Fund support for Parks. This had been tremendously helpful in maintaining safe, usable parks and recreation areas for our communities and our visitors.

5. Enhance the Reservation System.**Accomplishments:**

After an expensive, time-consuming initial start in FY2008/09, the Commission is very pleased with the progress being made on the new on-line reservation system. Further the Commission appreciates the Board's action to fund the reservations system through the Countywide automation fund. The camping and point of sale modules were implemented in September 2013 and the Day Use module was activated in September 2014. This system now provides full Park facility mapping for all local, Community and Regional County Parks throughout the County. Web site visitors have the ability to scroll over each site to gain information and click to reach the maps for the specific parks. Navigation further into the site provides the visitor maps of each group picnic area and photos with information for each site, and dates available up to one-year ahead.

Various options may be selected for individual sites to allow placement of a Bounce House, serving kegged beer, etc. Reservations may be placed through a linked secure site with credit card and a reservation confirmation may be printed immediately upon payment for the reservation. The County Parks and Recreation website (www.SLOCountyParks.org) provides a link icon that has been receiving reservations outside of the past Monday – Friday, 8:00am to 5:00 pm availability.

2014 Commission Recommendation:

Complete the on-line reservation system by adding the Recreation component to include recreation program registration. Enhance the online County Park facilities with printable trail maps and information. We encourage Staff to continually look for ways to improve the website and the marketing of the reservation system.

6. Expand Park and Recreation Services to Underserved Communities.**Accomplishments:**

Funding has been secured and the design/planning phase has been initiated for the San Miguel Park expansion and related "L" Street improvements. These actions and the projects when completed will provide this underserved community its first ever youth sized regulation sports field to allow local youth the opportunity to play organized league soccer, softball and baseball.

Funding has been secured to reconstruct the tennis courts at CW Clarke Park in Shandon. This is the only public tennis court available for the Shandon community.

In addition, Park Planning staffs continue to work with private property owners to secure a multi-use trail to connect the communities of Garden Farms and Santa Margarita. This will be the first multi-use trail available for these two underserved communities.

2014 Commission Recommendation:

Continue to work to find opportunities for enhanced Park facilities and recreational programming in underserved communities.

7. Locate Grants and alternative funding:**Accomplishments:**

2014 was a very successful year in obtaining nearly \$2.5 million dollars of outside funding for County Parks and Recreation as follows:

- A \$750,000 grant was secured from the California Wildlife Conservation Board for the Cayucos Pier renovation project and no match is required of this grant.
- A \$750,000 grant was secured from the California Coastal Conservancy for the Cayucos Pier renovation project and no match is required of this grant.
- A grant of \$72,312 was secured from the California Coastal Commission for improvements needed for the Cayucos 1st Street Accessway.
- A donation of \$235,000 was received from the Friends of Cayucos Pier group for renovation of the pier and replacement of the pier lighting system.
- A grant of \$461,800 was secured from SLOCOG and \$5,000 was received from the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo to assist in constructing the left turn lane into the Bob Jones pathway trail head at the Octagon Barn.
- A grant of \$200,000 was received from the Federal Transportation Program for the design for the Templeton to Atascadero connector trail.

2014 Commission Recommendation:

Commission encourages staff to launch a creative and aggressive program to search for grants and alternative funding sources to aid in park improvements, construction and development. Specifically investigate additional funding for trail construction and maintenance including SB1183 fees.

8. Enhance Marketing and Branding of County Park and Recreation programs and facilities.

Accomplishments:

The marketing and branding efforts for County Parks and Recreation have been effective. Funding was increased in the FY 14-15 operating budgets to perform Marketing and Promotions activities directly with Park and Golf staffs and a marketing firm has been hired to create an exciting new website. This site will be much more active and contain video content to expand upon the current narratives with photos.

The Marketing and Promotions team developed marketing strategies, advertisements and promotions. Staff conducted marketing campaigns to Los Angeles, the Central Valley and Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties. Advertisements were placed in the major newspapers, of those communities and using the web list of Park customers. Promotional offers were introduced and revenues increased approximately seven percent year over year.

In May 2014, County Parks and Golf provided the third annual Outdoor Discovery Festival at Lopez Lake to promote all of our parks and recreation services. Print and radio advertising was expanded to Santa Barbara County and drew hundreds of day use entries that improved revenues and provided over 170 children the opportunity to complete the DEER Challenge. Each child completed a minimum of ten of the sixteen recreational activities that day. Once again the kids **Discover the Environment through Education and Recreation (DEER)** program was very popular. Hundreds of visitors and campers enjoyed the music of two local bands, food from non-profit groups and caterers. County Parks has already been asked for camping reservations for the 2015 festival as the community is learning more and more about the services available through County Parks and Recreation.

In July of 2014, Parks and Recreation services participated in the Mid-State Fair for the second year. Park Rangers staffed an educational booth for all eleven days. Thousands of visitors passed by the booth and 1,750 kids took part in the DEER Challenge to identify foot prints and match them to mounted animals: a Black Bear, a Badger, Two Foxes, and a Raccoon. While the Rangers guided the kids through the DEER Challenge, parents provided their e-mail addresses for a chance to win a camping package. In this manner we obtained over 2,000 new e-mail contacts to inform customers of promotional specials to be run in both the cool season and mid-week days of the warm season.

The Greenskeepers and Concessionaires of the Golf Division staffed their portion of the booth with their Golf Simulator. Each visitor took swings simulating actual golf play on the world-famous 17th hole of Pebble Beach GC. Prizes were awarded to "Closest to the Hole" for each day with winners receiving free rounds of golf. Each golfer provided an e-mail address for future contacts as we and our concessionaires provide promotions and special events for our customers.

Staff has plans to run short commercials on local radio and television stations in summer, fall and winter 2015.

2014 Commission Recommendation:

We suggest increasing and expanding these efforts to create more visibility and desirability in multiple markets, as well as utilizing Park logos and signage at facilities to allow users to identify County Parks and their offerings quickly. We also recommend an evaluation of current efforts to determine the return on investment for each campaign,

evaluate extending or repeating the campaign and developing new ideas for marketing.

9. Create a sustainable Park System with the help of cities:

2014 Commission Recommendation:

We must begin to provide for both current and future needs. Our commitment must be based upon the understanding that a sustainable park program is an economic and social benefit for us. Develop a strategy with the cities and large user groups to create a sustainable Park system and provide more opportunities for the public by sharing resources.

It is important to provide parks, trails, and open space, but how can we fund them? One way is to partner with the cities to explore:

- A. Re-allocation of existing revenues;
- B. Setting-aside a percentage of the budget for future parks;
- C. Requesting a modest increase in sales tax to fund land purchases and provide for O&M;
- D. Utilizing property transfer fees or voter-approved assessments to build an economically stable service base.

10. Develop Strategic Partnerships.

2014 Commission Recommendation:

Create a plan on how to cultivate strategic partnerships and develop an ongoing community relations program to gain support and visibility for parks and recreation.

11. Create a County Recreation Council.

2014 Commission Recommendation:

Form a countywide council, including cities, to investigate ways to provide more services with existing resources and facilities.

12. Enhance focus on Recreation Programming.

2014 Commission Recommendation:

Create methods to add recreation programming as a separate fund within the Parks Department.

13. Increase Concessionaires.

2014 Commission Recommendation:

Explore ways to add concessionaires for added services and revenue (e.g Vista Lago).

14. Regional Open Space.

2014 Commission Recommendation: Explore the possibility and the benefits of whether the Parks and Recreation Department can implement or help implement the Conservation and Open Space Element, needed to protect resources and create future public open spaces.

15. Trail Corridors.

2014 Commission Recommendation: Work with County Public Works to maintain and enforce the clearance requirements established in the County Rights-Of-Way policy for the establishment of trails and trail corridors within the County. See: San Luis Obispo County Department of Public Works –2014 Public Improvement Standards – Appendix H1-4.

In conclusion:

San Luis Obispo County Parks and Recreation programs offer unquestionable value by providing a rich variety of recreational opportunities. San Luis Obispo County residents use them every day of the year, but that is just the beginning. The business from County Parks and Recreation generates jobs, funnels dollars to local businesses, increases property values, stimulates volunteer support, provides job training for youth, and fosters a strong sense of community by bringing people together. It's one of the best investments San Luis Obispo County has ever made and will continue to be one of the best investments in our future.

The San Luis Obispo County Park Commission stands enthusiastically ready to assist the County Parks and Recreation Department, its new Director and the Board of Supervisors in any way we can.